

Kol Rina  
*An Independent Minyan*  
Parashat Vayelech - Shabbat Shuva  
September 11, 2021 \*\*\* 5 Tishrei, 5782

Vayelech in a Nutshell

[https://www.chabad.org/parshah/article\\_cdo/aid/3098/jewish/Vayelech-in-a-Nutshell.htm](https://www.chabad.org/parshah/article_cdo/aid/3098/jewish/Vayelech-in-a-Nutshell.htm)

The Parshah of Vayelech (“and he went”) recounts the events of Moses’ last day of earthly life. “I am one hundred and twenty years old today,” he says to the people, “and I can no longer go forth and come in.” He transfers the leadership to Joshua, and writes (or concludes writing) the Torah in a scroll which he entrusts to the Levites for safekeeping in the Ark of the Covenant. The mitzvah of hak’hel (“gather”) is given: every seven years, during the festival of Sukkot of the first year of the shemittah cycle, the entire people of Israel—men, women and children—should gather at the Holy Temple in Jerusalem, where the king should read to them from the Torah. Vayelech concludes with the prediction that the people of Israel will turn away from their covenant with G-d, causing Him to hide His face from them, but also with the promise that the words of the Torah “shall not be forgotten out of the mouths of their descendants.”

Vayelech (Shabbat Shuvah) Haftarah in a Nutshell - Hosea 14:2-10; Micah 7:18-20.

[https://www.chabad.org/parshah/article\\_cdo/aid/566239/jewish/Haftarah-in-a-Nutshell.htm](https://www.chabad.org/parshah/article_cdo/aid/566239/jewish/Haftarah-in-a-Nutshell.htm)

The Shabbat between Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur is known as Shabbat Shuva or "Shabbat of Return (Repentance)." The name is a reference to the opening words of the week's haftarah, "Shuva Israel — Return O Israel." This haftarah is read in honor of the Ten Days of Repentance, the days between Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur.

The prophet Hosea exhorts the Jewish people to "Return, O Israel, to the L-rd your G-d," encouraging them to repent sincerely and ask for G-d's forgiveness. Hosea urges the Jews to put their trust in G-d, not in Assyria, powerful horses or idols. At that point, G-d promises to remove His anger from Israel, "I will be like dew to Israel, they shall blossom like a rose." The prophet then goes on to foretell the return of the exiles and the cessation of idol-worship amongst the people.

The haftarah concludes with a brief portion from the Book of Micah, which describes G-d's kindness in forgiving the sins of His people. "He does not maintain His anger forever, for He is a lover of kindness. He will have mercy on us, He will grasp our iniquities and cast all our sins into the depths of the sea." Micah concludes with an enjoiner to G-d to remember the pacts He made with the Patriarchs, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

FOOD FOR THOUGHT

Consenses vs. Command (Vayelech 5782) from the office of Rabbi Sacks z"l

<https://rabbisacks.org/vayelech-5782/>

What do you say to your successor? What advice do you give them? Vayelech is the place to look for the answer, because it is here that Moses finally hands the reins over to Joshua, and he and God both give him a blessing for the future. But they give different blessings. Listen to them and they sound almost the same. Moses says "Be strong and of good courage, for you will come [tavo] with this people into the land" (Deut. 31:7). God says, "Be strong and of good courage, for you will bring [tavi] the Israelites into the land" (Deut. 31:23). Tavo or tavi, "come with" or "bring." The words sound and seem similar. But the difference as understood by the Sages was total.

Here is how Rashi puts it:

**Moses said to Joshua, "Make sure that the elders of the generation are with you. Always act according to their opinion and advice." However, the Holy One blessed be He said to Joshua, "For you will bring the Israelites into the land I promised them" - meaning, "Bring them even against their will. It all depends on you. If necessary, take a stick and beat them over the head. There is only one leader for a generation, not two."**

These are the two extremes of leadership: consensus or command. Moses advised Joshua to pursue a policy of consultation and conciliation. What he was saying in effect was, "You don't need to follow the people. You are the leader, not they. But you do need to work with the elders. They too are leaders. They constitute, in effect, your team. They need to feel that they are part of the decision-making process. They will not expect you always to agree with them. Often they will not agree with one another. But they do need to feel consulted.

"If they sense that you are not interested in their opinions, if the impression they have of you is of a person determined to do things his way regardless of everyone else because you know better, they will attempt to sabotage you. They will do you harm. They may not succeed. You may survive. But you will be injured. You will limp. Your standing among the people will be diminished. They will say, how can we respect one who is not respected by the elders? "I speak from experience. The Korach rebellion was serious. It was not just Korach; it was also the Reubenites, and other leaders from the various tribes. And though the rebellion was cut short in the most dramatic way possible, we were all diminished and nothing was quite the same ever again. So: make sure that the elders of the generation are with you. If they are, you will succeed."

God, according to the Sages, took the opposite approach. "The time has come to leave the wilderness, cross the Jordan, conquer the land and build the kind of society that honours the human beings I made in My image instead of enslaving and exploiting them. Don't look for consensus. You will never find it. People's interests are different. Their perspectives are not the same. Politics is an arena of conflict. I did not want it to be that way, but having given humanity the gift of freedom, I cannot take it back and impose My will by force. So you must show the people the way.

"Lead from the front. Be clear. Be consistent. Be strong. The last person who

gave the people what they wanted was Aaron and what they wanted was a Golden Calf. That was nearly the end of the Jewish people. Consensus, in politics or business or even in pursuit of truth, is not leadership but the abdication of leadership. I chose you to be Moses' successor because I believe in you. Therefore, believe in yourself. Tell the people what they must do, and tell them why.

"Be respectful of them. By all means, listen to them. But at the end of the day the responsibility is yours. Leaders lead. They do not follow. And believe me, though they may criticise you now they will eventually admire you. People want their leaders to know the way, go the way and show the way. They want them to be decisive. Always treat people with the utmost courtesy and respect. But if they do not behave toward you as you do toward them, if they oppose and try to frustrate what you are doing, there may be no choice but to take a stick and hit them on the head. There is only one leader in a generation. If everyone is empowered, there is no music, only noise; no achievement, only an endless committee meeting at which everyone speaks and no one listens."

Those were, then and now, the two great options. But notice something odd. The person urging consensus is Moses. But Moses never acted by consensus. This is the man who almost had to drag the people out of Egypt, through the sea, and across a howling desert, the man who did things of his own initiative without even asking God.

This is the man who broke the Tablets of Stone hewn and engraved by God Himself. When did Moses ever lead by consensus? To be sure he had seventy elders, princes of tribes, and a devolved structure of administration with heads of thousands, hundreds, fifties and tens, but though they helped him, they did not advise him nor did he seek their advice. What suddenly turned Moses into a peacenik, a lead-by-consensus man?

That is one problem. The other is the advice given by God Himself: lead from the front, even against their will. But that is not how God acted, as understood by the Sages. This is what they said on the words immediately prior to the creation of humanity, "Let us make man in our image" (Gen. 1:26):

**"Let Us make man": From here we learn the humility of the Holy One, blessed be He. Since man was created in the likeness of the angels, and they would envy him, He consulted them...**

**Even though they [the angels] did not assist Him in His creation, and there is an opportunity for the heretics to rebel (to misconstrue the plural as a basis for their heresies), Scripture did not hesitate to teach proper conduct and the trait of humility, that a great person should consult with and receive permission from a smaller one.[1]**

The Sages, puzzled by the plural, "Let us make man," interpreted it to mean that God consulted with the angels. Despite the fact that the use of the word "us" was dangerous - it could be read as compromising the pure monotheism of Judaism - nonetheless the principle of consultation is so important that the Torah takes the risk of being open to misinterpretation. God consults, according to the Sages. "God does not act tyrannically toward His

creatures.” (Avoda Zara 3a)

To be sure, the Sages said that at Sinai God suspended the mountain above the Israelites and said, “If you say ‘No,’ this will be your grave.” (Shabbat 88a) But this is not the plain sense of the verse. To the contrary, before he gave the Torah to Israel he commanded Moses to explain to the people what was being proposed (Ex. 19:4-6). And it was only when the people – “all the people together” (Ex. 19:8) “with one voice” (Ex. 24:3) – that the covenant was made. That is the biblical basis for the idea, in the American Declaration of Independence, that governments gain their authority from “the consent of the governed.” The very act of giving humans freedom means that God never forces us against our will. As Eisenhower once said, “Hitting people over the head is not leadership: it is assault.” So why was God here, as it were, speaking out of character?

The answer, it seems to me, is this: Both God and Moses wanted Joshua to know that true leadership cannot be a one-sided affair, be it the pursuit of consensus or command-and-control. It must be a deft balance of both. They wanted Joshua to hear this in the most striking way, so each said what they were least expected to say.

Moses, whom everyone associated with strong, decisive leadership, in effect told Joshua, “Don’t forget to strive for consensus. Your task is not what mine was. I had to take people out of slavery. You have to lead them into a land of freedom. Freedom means taking people seriously. The leadership of a free people involves listening, respecting and striving for consensus wherever possible.”

God, who gave humans their freedom and never imposed Himself on people against their will, said, “Joshua, I am God; you are not. I have to respect people’s freedom. I have to let them go the way they are determined to go, even if it is wrong and self-destructive. But you are a human among humans and it is your task to show them the way that leads to justice, compassion and the good society. If the people do not agree with you, you have to teach them, persuade them, but ultimately you have to lead them, because if everyone does what is right in their own eyes, that is not freedom but chaos.”

In short, leadership is not simple. It is complex because it involves people and people are complex. You have to listen, and you have to lead. You have to strive for consensus but ultimately, if there is none, you must take the risk of deciding. Had they waited for consensus Lincoln, would never have ended slavery, Roosevelt and Churchill would never have led the free world to victory, and Ben Gurion would never have proclaimed the State of Israel. It is not the job of leaders to give people what they want. It is the job of leaders to teach people what they ought to want. But at the same time they must involve people in the decision-making process. Key figures and constituencies must feel that they were consulted. Collaborative, consultative, listening leadership is essential in a free society. Otherwise, there is autocracy tempered by assassination.[2]

Leaders must be teachers but also learners. They must be visionaries and yet have time for the details. They must push people but never too far, too fast, or they will fail. They must speak to the better angels of our nature, teaching us to love not hate, forgive not seek revenge. They must always prefer the

peaceful solution to the one that involves taking a stick and hitting people on the head, even though they are prepared to do so if there is no alternative. Leaders must be capable of more than one style of leadership. Otherwise, as Abraham Maslow said, “Those who only have a hammer treat every problem as if it were a nail.”[3]

Considering the effort, energy, stress and pain, why anyone should seek to be a leader would remain a mystery, were it not for this luminous truth: there is no better way to flood life with meaning than to have lifted others and helped them to a greatness they never knew they had; to have together with others righted some of the wrongs of this injured earth and its creatures; to have acted rather than waited for others to act, and to have brought others with you, for the greatest leader on earth or in heaven cannot lead alone.

These are what make leadership the greatest privilege by which any of us can be blessed. As Moses said to Joshua, “Happy are you to have merited leading the children of God.” (Rashi to Num. 27:18) The crown of leadership is invisible, yet you know who is wearing it and who is not. It is there, in front of you, waiting for you to put it on.[4] Wear it with pride and may all you do be blessed. [1] Rashi to Genesis 1:27; Genesis Rabbah, 8.[2] A phrase attributed to Voltaire but actually from German diplomat Georg Herbert zu Munster (1820–1902).

[3] The Psychology of Science: A Reconnaissance (New York: Harper & Row, 1966), 15–16.

[4] Mishneh Torah, Hilchot Talmud Torah 3:1.

## Renewing the Covenant – VaYeLeKh by Rabbi Yitz Greenberg

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In Parashat VaYeLeKh, Moses completes the entering-into-the-covenant ceremony for the new Israelite generation that was begun last week in Nitzavim. He hands over the leadership reins to Joshua, and deposits the Torah scroll he has written into the Ark of the Covenant, along with the tablets. He instructs all the people—men, women, and children—to gather together and read the scroll at a public assembly every seven years.<sup>1</sup> In this way, the Israelites will know the content of the brit (covenant) and what they are committed to as the people of the covenant.

The question is why? Why was this re-entry ceremony necessary? All of Israel stood at Sinai. The Divine Presence enveloped the mountain and the people publicly committed “all that God has proclaimed we shall do” (Exodus 19:8). Since the Torah is an eternal covenant, each generation thereafter is born into the brit. The Talmud (Yoma 73b) states that an oath to violate a commandment of the Torah is automatically null and void because the individual “is already sworn and obligated from Sinai”—so the new oath is disqualified.<sup>2</sup> Why then did Moses repeat the covenant swearing-in with the generation that was about to enter the Land of Israel?

It would appear that the main point of the ceremony is to illuminate the nature of the Torah’s authority. The renewal teaches us that the binding nature of the Torah and the brit is not because it was decreed at Sinai and all future generations are bound by that moment, whether they like it or not. The

authority of the Torah is binding because each generation rereads the partnership contract, is inspired by the vision, accepts the task and the terms, and signs on anew. Although we receive the Torah from our ancestors, one might say that being a covenantal Jew is not really an inheritance. It is rather a personally accepted commitment because I understand for myself and choose to be part of this ongoing covenant.<sup>3</sup>

Furthermore, the Torah teaches us that the Jewish covenant is open and being offered every day to whoever is ready to join in. Says Moses: “It is not with you alone I [God] make this covenant and this oath, but with the ones that stand here with us today before the Lord our God, and also with the ones who are not here with us today” (Deuteronomy 29:13-14). Future generations, born Jews, converts from outside—all are welcome. The offer is made today and every day. We can join the covenantal community by committing ourselves and our lives to this purpose.

The Torah is actually hinting at another reason for renewing the covenant. When a major change in condition is about to happen—in this case, when the Israelites are to go from a nomadic existence to a settled society of people in their homeland—then one should reread the constitution of the covenant to see if one really accepts it. The people should read its terms and make a good faith affirmation that they can—and will—live by its terms in the new situation. In fact, the covenantal offer may be modified to apply to the new condition. The Book of Deuteronomy contains many laws that apply only in the Land of Israel and that could not be fulfilled in the desert. Also, in Deuteronomy’s iteration of the covenant, the Torah says, “Parents (fathers) shall not be put to death for [the sins of the] children; neither shall children be put to death for the [sins of the] parents; every person shall be put to death [only] for his own sin” (Deuteronomy 24:16). This is a revision of the original terms of the Sinai covenant. In the Ten Commandments, it is said: “punishing the iniquity of the fathers upon the children into the third and fourth generations...” (Exodus 20:5). A midrash suggests that Moses made this revision and God approved it.<sup>4</sup>

The renewal of the covenant has a double function. It may represent a new level or substantive commitment on the part of the Jewish people,<sup>5</sup> or it may represent a shift in the divine expectations. I have written extensively on the Rabbis’ interpretation that God renewed the covenant in their times by self-limiting and transforming the original covenantal partners’ roles. God gave up total dominance in the brit, whereby the Lord decided all the events and outcomes in history. The Divine reduced control and invited the human partner to take on more responsibility and authority.<sup>6</sup> Revelation from Heaven ended as did prophecy. From that time on the Oral Torah plays a decisive role. If you want to know what God asks of us at this moment, humans must study past revelations and adjust them to the new circumstances. This is what Rabbis do. Their insight—or one might say “discovery”—is the will of God in the covenant.<sup>7</sup> Furthermore, human behavior and policies account much more for the outcomes in history. God stops intervening with visible miracles that override natural laws and human forces for the sake of those faithful to God. In light of the above, I argue that the Jewish people’s decision to go on living the covenant after the Holocaust constituted a renewed acceptance of the

Torah and brit under new terms. Post-Shoah, although God will be with us more than ever, there will be no guaranteed security and victory, even if we obey the Torah. We are responsible for defending ourselves and for accomplishing the fulfillment of the covenant in history. Similarly, the establishment of the State of Israel constitutes renewal of the partnership with humans acting as the agents responsible for redemption, such as the rescue of Arab Jews and Ethiopian Jews and the liberation of Soviet Jewry.<sup>8</sup> It follows that there is something missing in Jewish life today, a covenant renewal ceremony like the one that Moses enacted with the people of Israel on the plains of Moab. In my book *The Jewish Way*, written in the 1980s, I report Herschel Blumberg's<sup>9</sup> proposal that, on Yom Ha'Atzmaut, there should be a national renewal-of-the-covenant ceremony. Representatives of all the communities of diaspora Jews and Israel would gather and exchange "ratifications" of the covenant and expressions of unity and pledges of mutual help.<sup>10</sup> Similarly, at CLAL: The National Jewish Center for Learning and Leadership, we developed a personal renewal-of-commitment-to-the-covenant ceremony modeled on the Covenant between the Pieces. Through this ceremony, Abraham became the first Jew and the first to embrace the Jewish covenant.<sup>11</sup> A passageway is created, demarcated by a cleft ritual object (such as a large challah). People line up in dyads (spouses, friends, family members) facing each other on both sides. Each dyad dances a Torah scroll through the passageway and hands it over to the counterpart dyad who dance it back. All sing the song: "The people Israel, the Torah, the Holy One the Blessed are one [a unity], torah orah (the Torah is light), hallelujah." By passing through, individuals affirm faithfulness and renewed commitment to the covenant of redemption of the Jewish people. They commit to work together to realize the goal of tikkun olam, in which the Torah's ideal of paradise on earth will be realized in the real world.

In a time when we anxiously watch the rise of anti-semitism and the signs of Diaspora Jewry and Israel drifting away from each other, we should put our heads together and plan a covenant renewal ceremony for world Jewry. As Moses put it in our parashah: "Gather the people together, men, women, and children, and the stranger within your gates... that they may hear and that they may learn" (Deuteronomy 31:12). It is a time to particularly express our unity and common commitment to our duty as partners with God. We commit to join all humanity in healing the world in the face of environmental degradation and terrorist enemies of human dignity, equality, and peace. Wishing you and yours a Shanah Tovah.

May 5782 be a year of health, happiness, and tikkun olam.

<sup>1</sup> The ceremony is known as *hak'hel* (assemble) and took place during Sukkot every seven years in the Shemitah (Sabbatical) year. In fact, 5782 will be a Shemitah year. In recent times, the Israeli Chief Rabbinate has tried to restage a *hak'hel* ceremony, but with limited success. <sup>2</sup> See also Mishnah Shevuot 3:6. <sup>3</sup> On the word *morashah* (equal inheritance) in Deuteronomy 33:4 ("an inheritance of the congregation of Jacob"), an early midrash reads *me'orasah*, which means betrothal or marital commitment. See Sifrei Devarim #345, quoted in Babylonian Talmud Pesachim 49b (among other places). <sup>4</sup> Bemidbar Rabbah 19:33. In Berakhot 47a the Talmud explains that, in the original offer, the punishment for parents' sins into following generations was only if the children continued

the wicked ways of their parents. If the children were righteous, the sins of the previous generation would not be visited on them. See also Mekhilta Massekhta de-va-Hodesh 6.<sup>5</sup> In Babylonian Talmud Shabbat 88a, the Talmud describes the renewal of the covenant after Purim in the book of Esther.<sup>6</sup> See, for example, “The Age of Chastisement is Over,” Parashat Ki Tavo, available here: <https://www.hadar.org/torah-resource/age-chastisement-over>. I discuss this at length in my book, *The Triumph of Life* (forthcoming).<sup>7</sup> The Talmud Yerushalmi (Peah 2:6 / 17a) says that everything that a future veteran student of Torah innovates was revealed to Moses at Sinai.<sup>8</sup> The haredi failure to read the terms of the renewal covenant has led them to fail to meet their obligations. Thus, they do not serve in the IDF to protect Jewry, nor did they build the State, society, and economy which constitutes the beginning of the flowering of redemption.<sup>9</sup> Former chairman of United Jewish Appeal (UJA); then chairman of CLAL: The National Jewish Center for Learning and Leadership.<sup>10</sup> See *The Jewish Way*, pp. 399-401.<sup>11</sup> For a description of the ceremony, see *The Jewish Way*, p. 92.

[Shabbat Shalom: Parashat Vayelech/Yom Kippur by Rabbi Shlomo Riskin](https://ots.org.il/shabbat-shalom-parshat-vayelech-yom-kippur-5782/)  
<https://ots.org.il/shabbat-shalom-parshat-vayelech-yom-kippur-5782/>

*Efrat, Israel* - “**Now, therefore write this song for you, and teach it to the People of Israel...**” ([Deuteronomy 31:19](#)).

Is Yom Kippur a happy day or a sad day? Many associate the Day of Atonement with solemnity and trepidation. Indeed, according to most translations, the Torah specifically states regarding this holiest of days, “you shall afflict your souls” (Lev. 16:29).

The great Rabbi Levi Yitzhak of Berditchev, however, suggests a radically different understanding of this day. “On Tisha B’Av, I can’t eat because I’m so sad,” he said. “On Yom Kippur I have no need to eat, because I’m so happy.” But what of the command to afflict oneself? What is the basis for his happiness?

In truth, his interpretation reflects a deep insight about the essence of the day, based on the fact that the Hebrew letters that form the root, “affliction” (“ayin-nun-yud”), are also the letters that form the root for expressions of joyous song. For example, the Torah states (Deut. 26:5) regarding the declaration of the farmer, who, filled with feelings of happiness, brings the First Fruits (Bikkurim) to the Temple: (“V’anita v’amarta”), “you shall happily sing and declare...”, with the proper musical cantillations.

Similarly, at the Splitting of the Sea of Reeds, the Torah (Ex. 15:21) reports, “And Miriam (happily) sang to them” (“V’ta’an la’hem Miriam”)

This gives us a fresh perspective on the aforementioned verse in Leviticus, which as we noted above, is usually translated as “you shall afflict yourselves”. However, re-reading the Hebrew original - (t’anu et nafshoteichem”) - in light of the above, we can accurately understand it as “you shall make your souls sing”. Indeed, the next verse explains why we should be happy: “For on this day shall atonement be made for you, to purify you; from all your sins shall you be purified before God.”

We can now gain an appreciation of the verse in our portion that refers to the Torah as a song. In what way is the Torah a song? Because like a song, the Torah can bring us great happiness via the commandments, which allow us to ennoble and sanctify ourselves. In the same way that we enjoy a great high when we accomplish a difficult task and perform it well, so, too, does the song of the Torah allow us to rejoice in the potential of human nature and the ability of the human being to achieve a life of morality and holiness.

It is for this reason that the Day of Atonement is fundamentally a day of happiness. One might have thought that with all the fasting and the many hours spent in the synagogue, we should relate to the day in purely solemn terms. But Yom Kippur is not a fast of sadness. Rather, it is when we re-discover our great spiritual capacity to be like the angels who never need food or drink, soaring close to God, and transcending the physical. It is then that we understand the meaning of true rejoicing: spending twenty-five hours in fellowship with the Divine, without need of physical comforts. This experience opens the window to the spiritual rejoicing that gives us such great comfort and well-being.

Indeed, the custom in yeshivot is to ecstatically sing and dance with renewed vigor and dedication after the last Shofar blasts are sounded at the end of the Ne'ila prayer, at the conclusion of the fast. The excited students and teachers declare with their enthusiasm: Behold, we have transcended our physical selves. We have climbed upwards into the Divine embrace. We feel Your gracious compassion, and we are ready and hopefully worthy to attempt to perfect ourselves and the world.

[Moses's Journey, and Ours - Vayeilekh/Shabbat by Shuly Rubin Schwartz](https://www.jtsa.edu/moses%E2%80%99s-journey-and-ours)  
<https://www.jtsa.edu/moses%E2%80%99s-journey-and-ours>

Whenever I read the opening verse of this week's parashah, I recall the other parashah that opens with the same verb: לך-לך ("Go forth"). Told to go, Abram heeded God's call, uprooting his life and journeying—both physically and emotionally—first to Haran and then to the land of Israel. And now, as we near the end of the Torah reading cycle, Parashat Vayeilekh begins by attributing that very same action of journeying to Moses, as he nears the end of his life. What can we learn from the parallel acts of journeying that these two great leaders of our people undertook?

Abraham set out on a journey about which he knew nothing, spurred to do so in response to God's call. Moses's action of וילך (Deut. 31:1) tells a different story. Commenting on the first verse of our parashah, Seforno (Obadiah ben Jacob, c.1470–1550, Italy) understands וילך משה ("Moses went") to mean that Moses התעורר לזה ("awakened to it"). This awakening connotes self-drive. While Abraham responded to God's call with a leap of faith, Moses was motivated from within. Abraham's journey began without a clear sense of what was to unfold. With Moses, we encounter a leader inspired by a clarity of purpose and mission honed through decades of relationship with both God

and his people. He accomplished so much—as his orations that fill the book of Deuteronomy have detailed.

Abraham's "לך-לך" marks the beginning of his journey. Ironically, Moses's act of "וילך" marked some of the final footsteps of his life. It also has no complement—where did Moses go? The next phrase does not tell us where he went; it tells us what he said:

*וילך משה וידבר את־הדברים האלה אל־כל־ישראל.*—“Moses went and spoke these things to all Israel.”

Why then does the parashah begin with the verb of movement? At this moment, as B'nei Yisrael prepares for their long-awaited entrance into the Promised Land, Moses's journey is marked by a lack of *physical* movement. He has known for some time that he will not enter the land, the consequence of striking rather than speaking to the rock to extract water. He now must prepare himself to divulge this crucial information to his people. He surely anticipates that they will be frightened, angry, and dejected and that this could turn quickly to self-doubt, as they question whether they are up to this next challenge without him. Moses must undergo an *emotional* journey, moving past lingering feelings of sadness or bitterness to effect a smooth transition of power and give the people the strength and confidence to continue their journey. Thus, the next verb after “went” is “spoke,” as Moses shares all of this with the people. He confesses that at the age of 120, he can no longer be active and shares the news that he will not cross the Jordan River.

As we know, some of the most consequential journeys we take in life are invisible to the naked eye. This is, after all, our task during the month of Elul and the Yamim Noraim: to do the internal work to manage sadness, disappointment, frustration, and anger, and to reach out to those in our lives with a generous spirit and an eye toward the future.

Shadal (Samuel David Luzzatto, 1800–1865, Italy) makes explicit the connection between the parashah and the Days of Awe, by reminding us that the same verb, לך (go), is also used in reference to the shofar that accompanied the Revelation at Sinai:

*ויהי קול השופר הולך וחזק.*—“The blare of the horn grew louder and louder” (Exod. 19:19).

Several commentators note how this image of increasing, even swelling, sound is unusual, since generally the sound of an instrument grows fainter over time as human breath grows thinner.

This extraordinary image of the shofar blast growing in impact is mirrored by the force of Moses's message. Rather than dwelling on his own disappointment and brooding over his impending death, Moses addresses the people's anxiety head on. He publicly appoints his successor, Joshua, reassuring the people that he had been chosen by God. Moses then offers a rousing charge to both the people (Deut. 31:6) and Joshua (Deut. 31:7) to be strong and resolute. Hoping to bolster their spirits and fortify them, he uses the second verb חזק (“be strong”), that describes the shofar in Exodus and adds another, אַמץ (“and resolute”). His words instill in Joshua and the people of Israel the courage and stamina to continue the journey without him. The verb לך makes an additional appearance in this narrative, as Moses provides

reassurance to his people. Spiritual, emotional journeys can be scary, grueling, vulnerable, but while they can feel lonely, they are not; God will be with the people of Israel, God will go with the people:

יהוה הוא ההלך לפניך הוא יהיה עמך לא ירפך ולא יעזבך לא תירא ולא תחת —“And God, Godself, will go before you. God will be with you; God will not fail you or forsake you. Fear not and be not dismayed! (Deut. 31:8)

When we hear the shofar during these Days of Awe, we hope that it will awaken us, just as Moses awakened, according to Seforno, to do precisely the kind of journeying that Moses models—to consider our own paths, how we have fallen short, and how we might still do better for those we love and those in our charge.

In this way Moses’s—and Abraham’s—legacies continue to endure through the strength of each generation of Jewish journeyers. The shofar blast is the call to Abraham to set us on our journey; it’s also the reminder from Moses that we have the strength and knowledge within us to continue to progress in our life’s journey. Our task is not only to listen to the shofar, but to become the shofar—growing stronger in our conviction, and more resolute in our work of building and rebuilding a better world. When we do that, God will go with us. (*Shuly Rubin Schwartz is Chancellor and Irving Lehrman Research Professor of American Jewish History at JTS*)

[Vayelech - Yom Kippur by Rabbi Shaul Rosenblatt](https://mailchi.mp/tikun/haazinu5781-2579404?e=e0f2ca6c0d)

<https://mailchi.mp/tikun/haazinu5781-2579404?e=e0f2ca6c0d>

This is the shortest portion in the Torah, only 30 verses. Joshua is appointed as Moses’ successor, a commandment is given that every seven years (it would be this year if there was a Temple) the king should read the Torah to the entire nation in Jerusalem. The portion ends with an introduction to the next portion we will be reading - Moses’ final prophetic song.

I want to respond to a question that I have been asked numerous times over the years about Yom Kippur. It goes roughly as follows: we stand before God on Yom Kippur and say we are sorry. We admit that we have ‘transgressed’ and made mistakes in our lives during the past year. We might have spoken badly about others, not been grateful, been dishonest or disrespectful to our spouses. Then we say, usually with full sincerity, that we will never do it again – all the time knowing full well that it won’t take long until we are back to our old ways. The sincere desire for change of Yom Kippur seems to give way to the same old, same old, not too long after the fast ends. So what is the point? Here’s how I see it. You just can’t beat sincerity. And a sincere desire to change one’s life and live differently is change itself - in that moment. Living up to it is important, of course, but it’s not what matters most. That’s because we are all human and continually get things wrong – even when we have the best intentions. We absolutely, genuinely don’t want to be rude to our spouses – and then we end up doing just that. We want to get up early and use our time well – then sleep till midday. We plan on calling our parents to see how they are doing – then get distracted by life and it doesn’t happen. This is simply the human experience. No matter how sincere and committed we are, we don’t always manage to live up to our own hopes and expectations.

The change we are looking towards at Yom Kippur is not a change of action in the future – no one can guarantee such a thing. It is, rather, a change of heart in the present moment. That's the best we can do. Taking responsibility for the past, realising that we genuinely do want to be different in the future and the commitment to doing our best to move in a different direction in the future. Yes, we do play a role in whether that different direction happens or not, but ultimately it is not in our hands. Life springs surprises, we lose clarity, we get lost in the craziness of the moment and we find ourselves back where we were. And we make the exact mistake that we were never going to make again.

But that's OK; that's the process of life. You make choices, you make decisions, you make commitments and then you fall back. However..... there is growth in this process because more often than not, it's ten steps forward but only nine steps back. And that's progress itself. But in addition, there are those very special times in life – those gifts – when you have a new insight, and you see it so deeply and so clearly and with such clarity – that you never go back. Those moments are not ours to command. We can look for them, hope for them and pray for them – but they will come according to God's plan, not ours.

Yom Kippur is about looking for this change of heart. Whether or not that change will be permanent is not our job. Sincerity and genuineness are what matters. If you mean it in the moment – you mean it. And that's worth everything.

### Yahrtzeits

\* Cindy Salsbury remembers her mother Lynne Rader Salsbury (Leyke bat Flora) on Saturday September 11<sup>th</sup> (Tishri 5).

\* Blossom Primer remembers Irwin's father Joel Primer on Saturday September 11<sup>th</sup> (Tishri 5).

### **Kol Rina Announcements**

#### **Lulavim and Etrogim: Order by September 10**

Nancy Rothchild, our Lulav & Etrog wrangler, sends the following note:

"For 2021 Sukkot, Kol Rina will purchase Lulav/Etrog sets from the Lubavitch Center, West Orange **at their fixed price of \$43 per set.**

"Please place your orders with Nancy Rothchild at [nrothchild@aol.com](mailto:nrothchild@aol.com). Checks/payment of \$43 are made out to Kol Rina and sent to Nancy at 106 Rynda Road, South Orange, NJ 07079 so she may keep track of the orders and totals. All orders must be placed by September 10th in order to submit our total to Lubavitch Center. Nancy will pick-up the Lulav/Etrog sets and will

schedule a time to bring them to your home. You will not pick them up from her house this year."

## **Shabbat Shuva with Cantor Sharon, September 11**

A special service is planned for the Shabbat between Rosh HaShana and Yom Kippur, known as Shabbat Shuva. Cantor Sharon Litwinoff will lead Musaf during our regular Shabbat services, and speak on the music of the season. The program will be brought to you by the Susan Marx Fund for Adult Education at Kol Rina. Services begin at **9:45 am**. We hope you will join us

## **Monday evening minyan via Zoom**

Our regular weekday evening minyan will take place on Monday, September 13, beginning at 8:00. Your presence allows mourners and those observing yahrzeits to say Kaddish. Please support your Kol Rina friends by attending.

Use the following Zoom link to attend:

[https://zoom.us/j/97663987468?](https://zoom.us/j/97663987468?pwd=NjFhaVZUZkpSZ3pxQWJjOU5UWFR4QT09)

[pwd=NjFhaVZUZkpSZ3pxQWJjOU5UWFR4QT09](https://zoom.us/j/97663987468?pwd=NjFhaVZUZkpSZ3pxQWJjOU5UWFR4QT09)

Meeting ID: 976 6398 7468

Password: 080691